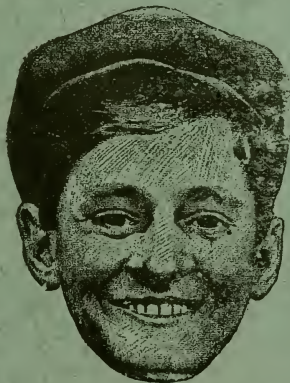


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BARBARA THE GREAT

—BY—
JULIA M. MARTIN

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PUBLISHED BY

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CHARACTERS

HENRY BAUER, a middle-aged store-keeper.

HARVEY HOOVER, a boy who helps at the store.

DICK WAIT, a chum of Harvey's.

MR. LEVY, a liveryman.

MR. PEDERSON, a farmer.



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no 1

Barbara the Great

Scene: A country store. Mr. Bauer hobbles in at the right entrance while Harvey is arranging the day's green groceries in the window.

BAUER—I dells you, dot leetle hen Barbara vot I got, dere iss not a hen vot beats her. Vot you tink? Dis morning again von egg. Dot makes von hunnert und seventy-nine days yet dot she hass laid every day von egg. Und von day better as dot. Ven I dells you, you would hartly believe it no more.

(Enter Dick.)

HARVEY—H'llo, Dick.

BAUER—All de odder hens shtops layin' ven it gits so cold, but you tink dot leetle Barbara would forget her piziness for dot yet? Not dot leetle bird. Every day, von egg!

HARVEY—Sure is some little hen, Mr. Bauer.

BAUER—*(with great pleasure in the phrase)* Some leetle hen, dot's right. *(Groans and holds his back as he stoops for a fallen ball of twine.)*

HARVEY—I should think a doctor could help that rheumatism a lot, Mr. Bauer.

BAUER—Na, na, I don't vant no doctors yet. I yust rub me over vonce wid liniment, and after a vile dot gets better.

(Enter Levy.)

LEVY—Well, how's everything, Mr. Bauer? Got any more o' that harness grease you sold me last week?

BAUER—Blenty, blenty.

LEVY—How's the rheumatism?

BAUER—Ach, dot gets bat yet sometimes. Dis veek

I haf hatta let Harvey feet my shickens und gatter mine eggs. By de vay, how iss your shickens laying now?

LEVY—Oh, same's usual, I guess. Martha, she 'tends 'em.

BAUER—Ya, vell, you see, I ain't got no woman, but if I did, dan she tends de shickens, all egsept dot leetle Barbara hen yet. She iss de leetle vunder. Von hunnert und seventy-nine eggs I got yet, every day von wit-out missing. Dot leetle hen I tends myself, vife or no vife. If I should dell you vat she done, dot leetle hen, you would hartly belief it. Von day—

(Exit Bauer, following Levy out as he talks. Harvey gives Dick a punch in the ribs, and as soon as the door closes behind Bauer they get their heads together, Harvey talking rapidly and with great glee.)

HARVEY—Listen.

DICK—Ya, well?

HARVEY—Oh, gee, Dick, it's great! You know, one day last week the old gentleman had me feed his chickens because of his rheumatism. Well, there wasn't any egg in Barbara's nest. And so I—

DICK—You put one in.

HARVEY—Bet your neck I did. I hated to have the old chap's favorite hen go back on him the same day his old legs and back did, so I slipped an egg that was in one of the other nests into Barbara's and then I brought the egg in to Mr. Bauer, so if he asked me I could say it was from Barbara's nest.

DICK—Oh, gee, that's great. Did he ask you?

HARVEY—Sure he didn't. Raved along same's usual about how little Barbara couldn't fail. Well, I been gathering the eggs all week, and after that cold snap came on I had to "help" Barbara keep up her record twice. He gathered the eggs himself yesterday, but I was afraid she might not have one, so I slipped out there and put one in. And gee, Dick, it was a Minorca egg, about twice as big as a Leghorn's ought to be. Bauer's been up in the

air ever since he found it. He thinks he's got a hen that cold weather only improves.

DICK—(*slapping his leg*) That's too good a joke to let die so young, kid. Let's keep it up a while. I'll slip Barbara the eggs this week.

(*Bauer hobbles in. Bell clangs. Pederson enters.*)

PEDERSON—Good morning, Mr. Bauer. Harvey, just reach me down a couple cans of that corn, will you? (*To Bauer.*) How's the rheumatism?

BAUER—Oh, dot gets better, dot gets better. Yesterday I tended de shickens and carried my own wood again yet .

PEDERSON—That's good to hear. By the way, how's the little Leghorn's record coming along?

BAUER—(*scratching his head*) I dell you, it's vonderful about dot bird. All mine odder hens iss shtopped layin' beguss it iss so cold. But vat you tink de leetle Barbara does? Vell, by shiminy, yesterday she laid *two* eggs!

(*Something seems to be the matter with Harvey. He chokes and ducks his head, pretending to hunt something behind the counter. Stuffs twine ball into his mouth. Pederson starts to explode into incredulous laughter, but checks himself. Stares at Bauer.*)

PEDERSON—Well, Mr. Bauer, that's a regular record, I should say.

BAUER—Ya, you don't pelief me yet. But by shiminy it vas so. I finds my egg yust like always by de noon time. Ven I feeds dot bird in der afternoon vas yet an-odder egg in de nest.

PEDERSON—Couldn't ha' been, Bauer. One of your other hens must have laid in her nest.

BAUER—Ya, you ask de butcher about dot, den. Beguss dis veek I sole 'em all on de butcher but de leetle Barbara. I don't keep no hens no more in de vinter vat don't lay eggs. Next year I raise me some bullets again from Barbara's shicks. Maybe dey be layers.

PEDERSON—(*sarcastically*) Ya, maybe her chicks'll lay *three* eggs a day.

BAUER—(*earnestly*) Ach, you don't pelief me. Vell, I don't plame you needer. I guess you didn't see no birds like dot down by de State College, ain't it?

PEDERSON—Bauer, it's physically impossible for a hen to lay more than—

BAUER—Na, na, it ain't impossible, beguss de leetle Barbara, she did it.

(*Exit Bauer, following Pederson, and still arguing.*)

DICK—What'd you do that for? Good enough was good enough. We'll spoil the thing if we try to make the hen do such stunts. One egg a day's as much as even Bauer will swallow forever.

HARVEY—(*laughing till he chokes*) Honestly, I didn't fix it that way o' purpose. I guess the old man was a little early and had already gathered his egg for the day, when I put mine in. Oh, sufferin' cats! (*Leans against wall and shakes with laughter. Enter Bauer, cheerfully.*)

BAUER—I knew dey wouldn't pelief it yet any more. Dere vasn't so many hens like dot. But ve, ve know it iss true. Von hunnert und seventy-eight days it iss, every day von egg; und von day two. Dot makes von hunnert und seventy-nine. I dells you vat, poys. If it comes to von hunnert eighty today, ve'll make a leetle zelebration by it. I hires an auto tonight und dakes you down to Zigsville. Ve goes to dinner by der hotel dere und ve go vonce on de show yet. Vat you say?

DICK—Gee! That's mighty handsome of you, Mr. Bauer.

BAUER—Ya, ve'll go tonight ven de shtore gloses. Oh, it comes, it comes sure enough. I goes in ten minutes out for de egg. Barbara de leetle Barbara lays always by de same time. Und you tink she will miss vonce today? Oh, na! Dot treat comes all right. Now, you poys vatch de store vile I puts me some potatoes on for my dinner. Na, de leetle Barbara never forgets vat der old

man likes for de next day's breakfast. Every day von egg. You tink I could eat any eggs vat any odder shick-ens laid? De leetle Barbara knows dot. Und she von't forget her piziness today. Ya, dot leetle treat comes all right. (*Exit.*)

HARVEY—Gee, what'll we do if she does lay that egg, Dick?

DICK—Dunno. Suppose we'd go, wouldn't we? It's kinda rotten, ain't it? But you see, if she does lay today, after the way he's been stakin' on it, it's a kind of once-in-a-lifetime anniversary to the old gent. Gosh, I'd hate to spoil it for 'im.

HARVEY—Yes, but—

DICK—Ya, I know, Harvey. I feel that way about it, too. Helpin' Barbara lay doesn't seem quite the same thing since he up and made that offer to treat us. He'll order a dinner that would make a French chef gasp, too.

HARVEY—Besides, if the hen's been missing lately, she'll disappoint him anyway some day during this cold snap, you know. Gee, kid, I'm not going to let him blow in a lot of money on us for stuffin' him. Maybe you didn't notice, but I did, the way Levy was grinning the last time he asked about the palgued hen. That two-egg day was too strong for 'em. I don't think we ought to let him go on talking about it. They think the old gentleman's going nuts, or else trying to sell a \$1000 bird, or something.

DICK—I never thought of that. You're right, kid. If she lays today we getta tell him what we been up to.

(*They grin at each other.*)

DICK—(*sheepishly*) I suppose we *could*—

HARVEY—What?

DICK—Could take the egg out of her nest if she's laid one today.

HARVEY—I'll do it. (*Hugs Dick with joy over the suggestion. Exit Harvey. Enter Bauer.*)

BAUER—Ve must order some more shpool cotton ven ve are by Zigsville, Dick. Don't let us forget dot.

DICK—But if we shouldn't go to Zigsville, sir?

BAUER—Ach, you are yoost like Pederson yet. You don't tink dot leetle bird vill make good beguss it iss de last day. Vell, I know yoost how you feel. I haf been a poy vonce, und I was afraid dere would be an eart-quake or somedings before de circus, so I hatta miss it yet. But you vill get by Zigsville all right yet. (*Enter Harvey.*) Beguss now it iss time I should gedder de egg, und ve'll see vonce yet. (*Exit.*)

DICK—Did you get her egg away?

HARVEY—Yep, here 'tis. (*Puts it under others in a basket on the counter.*) Pretend to be very anxious to hear if she laid this morning. He'll think it mighty curious if we aren't anxious to hear whether we get that trip.

(*Enter Bauer. Goes to tray of spools, and, turning to the boys, says irritably:*)

BAUER—Here, you! Ve must take shtock of dis shpool cotton und orter some ven ve be by Zigsville.

(*The boys look at each other in surprise. There is a silence. They take stock and make notes. Bauer crosses the room for a pencil.*)

DICK—You ask him if Barbara laid.

HARVEY—No, you.

(*Bauer recrosses room. Looks blue. Takes up case of spools.*)

DICK—Well, did Barbara win out on the last stretch Mr. Bauer?

(*Bauer drops the case of spools, which roll in every direction. He takes much time in helping the boys pick them up.*)

BAUER—Vat you wass saying?

DICK—I said, did Barbara come through with her egg this morning?

BAUER—(*Looks at the boys with a benevolent reluctance to disappoint them. Pause.*) Vat! You would mistrust dot leetle hen? (*Pause.*) Never fear noddings. Dot treat iss coming tonight all right. Dot comes yet. Vy, dere iss Levy, now, by der corner. You poys run out yet, und tell him ve vant hiss little runabout donight.

(*Exeunt boys.*)

BAUER—(*to himself*) Vell, I hatta say it, ain't it? If I didn't said it I would be sheating de 'eetle Barbara out of dot zelebration vat she ought to haf for laying von hunnert seventy-nine eggs, yoost beguss she didn't made it von hunnert eighty. Dot wouldn't be right would it? Und—I haf been a poy yet, und hatta miss de circus vonce.

(*Enter Levy.*)

LEVY—I was just coming in for some rivets, anyhow, Bauer. So you three gay young fellows want the little Maxwell tonight, do you? All right. I'll feed her oats, and get her into good trim.

BAUER—How much you sharge? Ve vant to go by Zigsville und back.

LEVY—Oh, the boys settled with me when they spoke for the machine, Mr. Bauer.

BAUER—Vat? Vere are dey?

LEVY—They said they were going to phone ahead for the dinner. Maybe I hadn't ought to have told you they were paying for it. Of course I didn't know anything about their plans. (*Exit.*)

(*Enter boys.*)

BAUER—Now, poys, vat you done dot for? Shteppped in und paid everydings? You tink I vas going to let you do dot? By shiminy, no! Dis vas de leetle Barbara's treat.

HARVEY—Why, we—we kinda thought that would be doing the right thing, Mr. Bauer.

BAUER—Ya, vy did you, den?

(*Harvey is silent.*)

DICK—Well— (*Gets stuck. Looks at Harvey.*)

HARVEY—(*resolutely*) Mr. Bauer—

BAUER—Ya, vell?

HARVEY—(*Backing down. Hastily.*) It's—it's pretty cold, isn't it?

BAUER—Sure, sure. I'll fix it mit Levy so he gives your money back by you.

HARVEY—Mr. Bauer, you know that morning you found two eggs in Barbara's nest?

BAUER—(*looks at him shrewdly*) Vell?

HARVEY—(*backing down again*) . That was—a pretty cold morning, t-too, wasn't it?

BAUER—Vat's de matter wit you yet?

DICK—I think we ought to tell you, sir. That second egg Barbara laid wasn't quite—quite correct, sir.

BAUER—You put it in der nest, you young shyster? (*Very angry.*)

HARVEY—No, sir, I did, sir. I was having a little fun that morning.

BAUER—You haf interfered wit de leetle hen's record like dot? You young good for noddings! Dot's a nice ding vat you did by me, ain't it? For dot shmartness, maybe you loose your chob yet. So, den, it iss only von-hunnert und seventy-eight eggs vot she laid?

HARVEY—No, sir—that isn't quite correct either, sir. The morning you found the large egg in her nest I was—I was having some fun, too, sir. (*He isn't having any fun right now, judging by his looks.*)

BAUER—But dot was six days ago. (*Puzzling. Suddenly blazing.*) Ach, vat a young shyster's work iss dot! Tell me, den, how long you haf been blaying diss trick?

HARVEY—I began it when she had laid the hundred and seventy-third egg, sir. She failed us that morning, and I knew you wouldn't eat any other egg but hers, and it was so cold a day, sir, and—

BAUER—Ya, I guess dot vas de morning vot I hat dot rheumatisms so bat. How many times she haf missed, since den?

HARVEY—Four times.

BAUER—(*His head slightly dropping forward. After a pause.*) Vell, I guess dot vas de end of it yet, anyhow, den. (*To Harvey.*) You go und catch me Barbara und bring her in vonce by me.

HARVEY—Yes, sir. (*Exit.*)

DICK—But you'll go with us to Zigsville, won't you, Mr. Bauer?

BAUER—(*Hesitates, then—*) Oh, ya, I go vit you. (*Brightening up.*) Sure! Maype he didn't mean it so bat dot first mornings he blayed dot little drick.

(*Enter Harvey with the hen tucked under his arm. Bauer takes her.*)

BAUER—Ah, dere—de leetle Barbara! Da iss de little vunder. Ya, you vasn't no freak bird, layin' eggs twice a day. But you vas a fine leetle gold mine, all de same! All de same!

(*Enter Pederson.*)

PETERSON—How's the phenominal hen coming along, Bauer?

BAUER—(*confused*) Oh, dot hen—dot vas my misdake about dose two eggs vot she laid von day. It was a gupple of young roosters vat laid dose exdra eggs dot time yet.

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